

Ganesh Chaturthi

Sunday, the 27th of August 2006

Jyotikar Pattni



*“Aum Karrum_bindu sayuktaamm_nyityam dhyayantih
yoginaha_Kaamadam mokshadam chaiva Aum karayaye namoh
namah Aum Lambodarayaye namoh namah.”*

*“Aum is the ‘beeja-akshari’ mantra that manifested from an
eternal point in eternal time with the dance of mystical karma of
shiva and Shakti to deliver congruence from the eternal to the
existence to the earth in the passage of time. “Aum” is the only one
beej mantra unparalleled in sound, symbol and tantra as a result
of which the yogi (Arjuna) or the spirit of life contemplates total
divine spiritual liberation passing through the hurdles of desire
and attachments and the illusions of transient life.”*

*“Aum” is the manifestation of the sound of Gods. From the
nothing-ness teeming vast sky referred to as “ananta_akasha”
the shape of aum surrounds the entire whole galaxy from an
infinite dot back to the infinite dot in a symbol referred to as
“akaal-brahma-swaroop - nirguna gaja swaroop, the fathomless
eternal grand one that only one unifying symbol of eternal God in
“mantra”, “tantra” and “yantra”. “Aum” is the welcome to
Godhead, “Aum” is the grand prelude beeja- mantra of
“Maha_Gana_dhi_Pattayeh” that contemplates all four purposes
of life namely desire, proliferation, religion and liberation. “Aum”
is the point at which all rivers merge with the grand divine ocean
loosing their names, forms and shapes. “Aum is the point of
spiritual eternity. The entire whole existence, the whole galaxy of
cosmic deities and cosmic constellations and cosmic divination
tantamount the large belly of Lord Ganesh, the grandest.*

Once there was neither being nor non-being; there was neither form nor formlessness. Then, That which was hidden within Itself, that One, stirring, emerging, coming to be, from Itself to the formless to the form. Immutable, changeless, everywhere, pervading all, yet not physically visible that grand cosmic God 'param-atman purusha' 'jagada-atman' the cosmic God prevailed in the dance of subtle karma of the Shakti – the divine one. Such is the mystery of Vedic cosmic Godhead.

Suddenly an ancient note piercing the darkness became the first divine glow of light. From the light came a divine sound of music, from the divine sound of music came a divine song whose birth stirred the slumbering, summoning an eternal mystery to awaken and the shimmer and to make an extravaganza. Emerging from deep within the blue oceans, the infinite teeming vast sky, the grand nightingale, hidden caves, the mysterious constellations, the human hearts, "Ganesha's" truth flows from the ice cave of the infinite.

Housed within our gated dwelling, Ganesha the guest loved and longed for emerged. That which has no form, can take a form yet was not borne out of the womb of the normal but the illusion of MAA. That which has no name, can take a name. From the formless to form, and back again and again and again, the wheel of time gathers speed, and somewhere between fact and legend, vision and myth, we ask, "**Who is Ganesha?**"

Most households lovingly sing his praises. There are those who worship and adore him beyond words. There are those who represent him in art and literature. There are those who tell stories about him. There are those who chant his glory in many different colourful ceremonies like weddings, house warming, and all auspicious celebrations. No one recites Ganesh in funerals. Ganesha the great giver of abundance, wealth, prosperity, the remover of all obstacles and the embracer of all sweetness, brings to our households divine happiness, divine harmony and divine warmth of love and affection.

The thinkers think, the scholars ponder, philosophers put together lyrics, poets rhyme Ganesha, singers sing him, Musicians play his divinity mystically, the devotees worship; but what is the grand great Ganesha's hidden meaning?

There is a long and hoary lineage of seekers, scholars, philosophers, who have attempted to plumb the mysteries of the elephant-headed one 'Gaja-Ganesha'. Anthropologists, artists, religious aspirants, historians, ideologists, linguists, philosophers, sociologists, and contemporary devotees of Ganesha are but some of the most recent representatives of this enquiry. Each group has attempted, and continues to attempt, to make sense of this enormously popular deity. Seemingly incongruous facts simultaneously coincide. Ganesha embodies: An enormous popularity that transcends sectarian and territorial limits; a seemingly rather late, yet dramatic, full-blown appearance into a religious pantheon; a confusing, conflicting, yet interesting and intriguing mythology; and an elephant's head atop a plump human body! To further complicate the picture is the fact that the physical representation of Ganesha offers more iconographic variations than does that of any other Indian deity. Couple this with the fact that Ganesha literature is rife with a seemingly endless number of stories on an unexpectedly limited number of themes. O Ganesha, who are you really? Tell the others what you want, tell them anything, but between you and me, who are you really?

***Vakratunda Mahaakaaya Suryakotee Sama Prabha Nirvighnam
kuru mey Deva Sarva kaaryeshu Sarvadaa***

Vakratunda	curved trunk
Mahaakaaya	large bodied
Surya kotee	million suns
Sama Prabha	with the brilliance of
Nirvighnam	free of obstacles, free from fears, free from hurdles
Kuru	make
mey	my
Deva	Lord
Sarva Kaaryeshu	in all work
Sarvada	always

“O Lord Ganesha of Large body, curved trunk, with the brilliance of a million suns, please make all my work free of obstacles, always.”

Lord Ganesh is the ever-blissful, elephant-headed Vedic-God ‘Deva’ (god) who is lovingly worshipped and revered by millions of people worldwide. Although Ganesh is known through the Hindu Vedic religion, Shri Ganesh transcends the cosmic Vedic religion universally and is loved by many non-Indians alike, throughout the world. ‘Maha-Ganapati’ the great Ganesh the unique one is worshipped by both Vaishnavas (devotees of Vishnu) and Saivites (devotees of Shiva). It is for this transcendent, all-embracing, auspicious Lord of the Ganas, Sri Maha-Ganesh (the great divine Ganesh), that this article is dedicated to.

Enjoy and may all goodness embrace your families. Much peace to you!

What Ganesh Stands For: Ganesha has four arms which symbolise his status as the universal ruler and establishes his power as the cosmic prime minister over the four categories of beings - those who can live only in the water, those who can live in water and on earth, those who can live only on earth and those who can fly in air. Significance of four: It was God Ganesha who instituted four Vedas. Hymn in Sri Bhagavat-Tattva’:

‘In heaven, this child of divinity from the shiva-shakti will establish the predominance over cosmic gods, on earth over men, in the nether world over anti-gods and serpents. He causes the four principles of the elements to move and is therefore four armed. In one hand, he holds a shell, in another a discus, in the third a club or a sweet and in the fourth a lotus.’

Thus, all aspects of Ganesh's form are filled with symbolic meanings.

The son of Shiva and Parvati, Shree Ganesh, is the God of Good Luck and Auspiciousness and is the Dispeller of problems and remover of obstacles. He is also worshipped as the God of wisdom, wealth, health, celibacy, fertility and happiness. In the panchayatana puja, Ganesh is glorified as one of the five prime Hindu deities (Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva, Shakti and Ganesha) whose worship confers immortality and liberation. Every puja hence commemorates the prelude of Ganesh puja as without his invocation nothing materialises.

Ganesha is associated with the swastika symbol – that which in the Vedic ancient mantra literature signifies the nine cosmic points and the twelve cosmic divine mantras of the kundali or the wheel of cosmic horoscope. The four dots in the swastika signify the four Vedas and the four purposes of life. The swastika is the yantra of Ganesha as the symbol Aum is the mantra of Ganesha's beej-shakti. Hence, the ancient cosmic Vedic Gods pronounced the authenticity of all mantras with the prelude AUM and with the prelude of Ganesh mantra. There is not a single auspicious ceremony without Ganesha being invoked prior to undertaking any rites, rituals and process.

“Aum namo Gannapattee tubhyam jyeshtha-jyeshtha te namah”

Devotees of Ganesha are known as 'Ganapatyas', and Ganesh Chaturthi (also known as Ganesha Chaturthi or Vinayaka Chaturthi) is the holy festival that celebrates His Glory through India by all Hindu's. Vinayaka Chaturthi is celebrated on the 4th day of the bright half of Bhadrapada. Ganapati transcends all sects and views and is equally worshipped by both Saivites and Vaishnavas and non-Hindus because Ganesh is viewed as an Incarnation of both Vishnu and Shiva. Ganesha is even worshipped and revered among Buddhists and Jains. In the main, this is a grand Maharashtra festival.

Ganesh Chaturthi is an occasion or a day on which Lord Ganesha makes his presence on earth for all his devotees. It is also known as Vinayaka Chaturthi in Telugu. It is not the birthday of Lord Ganesha albeit its significance closely relates to the same. The festival is observed in the Hindu calendar month of Bhaadrapada, starting on the shukla chaturthi (fourth day of the waxing moon period). While held all over India, it is at its most elaborate in Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh, and other areas which were former states of the Maratha Empire. This typically comes sometime between 20th of August and 15th of September. The festival lasts for 10 days, ending on Ananta Chaturdashi. “Ganesha Chaturthi” is one of the most popular Hindu festivals. It is the day most sacred to Lord Ganesha and falls on the 4th day of the bright fortnight of 'Bhadrapada' (August - September). Ganesha or Vinayaka Chaturthi is celebrated throughout India, as well as by the devoted Hindus all across the world. Vinayaka Chaturthi is auspiciously a day for congregating all the auspicious ceremonies all together in one grandeur ritual.

Vinayaka Chaturthi is set apart for the sole worship of Ganesh, the common deity of all Hindus. As he is supposed to be very fond of rice puddings, these dishes are cooked on a very large scale in every Hindu house and offered to the God, to be consumed by the members of the family, after the worship is over. A fresh image of Ganesh in clay is made and worshiped on this day. One hundred and eight different names of this God are repeated after the preliminary ceremonies and 108 different flowers are thrown in worship over them. The origin of this worship is prehistoric.

Yudhisthira, the hero of the *Mahabharata*, Damayanti, the queen of the Nishada King Nala, Indra, the Lord of Heavens and even Krishna, the expounder of the *Bhagavatgita* are said to have devoutly worshipped Ganesh and to have obtained their desired ends.

Vinayaka or Ganesh is the eldest son of Shiva and Mata_Parvati, or of Mata_Parvati only, according to the following legend, as he sprang from the dirt of her body. Shiva had gone from home and Mata_Parvati was left alone on the Kailasa; she wished to have a bath and not liking the idea of any person entering the house then, she rubbed her body with her hands and from the dirt that rolled off produced a figure to which she gave life and named Ganesh. She then asked Ganesh to sit at the door and allow no one, who so ever one might be, to come inside until she had finished her bath. Ganesh sat at his duty and while Mata_Parvati was bathing inside, Shiva returned home. He wanted to enter his house, but Ganesh would not allow him. After trying in vain to persuade him with gentle words, the great god used threats which, however had no effect. He was at last compelled to cut off Ganesh's head and force his way in. When the goddess who was within perceived her lord entering and when she came to know that Ganesh had been murdered, she would not speak to Shiva and promised to become the great MAHA-KALI in rage and dismal hurt until her attendant son was restored to back to life.

In order to do this, Shiva gave orders to his army of the Bhutaganas to find the first living creature that slept with its head turned towards the north, to

cut off its head and to fit it into Ganesh's body. The Bhutas searched and searched for a very long time.

At last Shiva found an elephant asleep with its head to the north, and cutting off its head, the army of Shiva brought it and fixed it to the Ganesha's body, and by powers vested into Shiva, shiva gave Ganesha all the 'tantras' and 'mantras' to rise him up alive in body and elephant in face. This story also accounts for the belief of Hindus to avoid the northern aspect in sleep. In view of granting Ganesh the nine qualities of yoga, the twelve emblems of Vedic rites, rituals and ceremonial rights, the fullest cosmic powers to the governing God of the celestial, not only Shiva restored back Ganesh but granted him the honour of being the cosmic prime minister and gave the boon and showered blessings that Ganesha shall be worshiped in all auspicious occasions and all auspicious celebrations and all auspicious family occasions until time finishes. Only after this did Shiva obtain forgiveness from Mata_Parvati.

Another mythological pre-historic story is that of Shanni-deva casting an eye on Ganesha's clay idol that Mata created on the Ganesh Chaturthi and because of the awesome beauty unparalleled to none, Shanni became jealous and envious and his evil eyes empowered to burn Ganesha's head. In agony Mata_Parvati pledges to Lord Shiva to not only restore the Ganesh back to life but to grant her son the commanding position in the cosmos such that in the future NO one cosmic god would bring harm to Ganesha, otherwise Maa vowed to destroy the entire existence with her maha-kali form. To avoid this happening and to respect her wishes the first ever head Shiva comes across is the head of a baby girl elephant whose mother agrees to give Shiva the consent to cut off and take. Shiva then returns to Mata_Parvati and restores back the head of Ganesha and Ganesha gradually comes to life with sixty four tantras and mantras of Shiva, twenty seven constellations, all together cosmic powers of existence and Ganesha is bestowed as the cosmic prime minister. Only thence Mata_Parvati becomes Gauri_Sundari or the back to the beautiful one. Mata when she beholds Ganesha in her laps whilst sat on the lion, admires Ganesha's most beautiful eyes and wonders how come the eye lashes of this elephant head are so long and beautiful and divine. It was then Shiva tells Maa that the head is that of a 'she' baby elephant. Mata does not mind because she

had Ganesh restored back to life and when Mata strokes Ganesh's back, the trunk of Ganesh turns right wards to Mata-Parvati's face and embraces her with immense affection and love.

Every merchant commences his operation after first propitiating this deity. In marriages and every other kind of religious ceremony, Vinayaka is the first God whose help is invoked. Almost all the standard works in Sanskrit and the Vernacular languages begin with an invocation of the help of Ganesh. Vinayaka's figure is represented as elephant in face and man in body. The elephant's head is regarded as the emblem of sagacity. In his image he is always seated at his ease, with his legs folded under him on a lotus throne. He has four arms and they hold an elephant's trunk, a noose, a mace, and a *Modaka* (rice pudding). He wears a crown. His ears are adorned with jewels and his forehead *vibhuti* - the sacred ashes and red kumkum and orange chandana. He wears a garland of pearls and precious stones round his neck. He is worshipped under the different names of Vinayaka, Ganesh, Ganapati, Pillaiyar, etc. As this most popular deity is worshipped in almost every village, there is a belief among certain people that he is the god of the Sudras and lower orders, who are generally uneducated.

"Who is Vinayaka? In the sloka beginning with the words, Suklaambaradharam Vishnum, only the form of the deity is described. But there is another inner meaning for the name "Vinayaka". Suklaambaradharam means one who is clad in white. Vishnum means he is all-pervading. Sasivarnam means his complexion is grey like that of ash. Chathurbhujam means he has four arms. Prasannavadanam means he has always a pleasing mien. Sarvavighnopasaanthaye means for the removal of all obstacles. Dhyayeth, meditate (on him). Vinayaka is the deity who removes all bad qualities, instills good qualities and confers peace on the devotee who meditates on him Vinayaka means that he is totally master of himself. He has no master above him. He does not depend on anyone. He is also called Ganapathi. This term means he is the lord of the ganas - a class of divine entities. This term also means that he is the master of the intellect and discriminating power in man. He possesses great intelligence and knowledge. Such knowledge emanates from a pure and sacred mind." Ganesh is the

grandeur prime minister of the Vedic cosmic sky, as he is like a deity of all! In the celestial, Brahma, Vishnoo, Mahesh, Saraswatti, Laxshmee, Kali all together worship him as grand deva or Lambodarayeh!

In the spiritual world, all the angels, and spirits cherish his glorious grandeur in hymns. In the terrestrial world, he is worshipped in every heart as the Grand God of all wisdom, all together Grand God of abundance and giver, hence he is known as Lambodarayeh.

Lord Naradji sang the following hymn for Ganesh:

*“Aum Ajam nirvikalpama niraakaramekam
niraananda_ma_ananda_ma_ddaittapurnnam.*

*Param-Nirgunam Nirvikalpam Niriham; Parabrahma_roopam,
Ganesham_bhajeaham.*

*Gunateetamanm Chidaananda_Roopam; Chida_Bhasakam Sarva_gann
Gyannagamyam.*

*Munidhyeyam Aakasharupam Paresham; Parameishwaram,
parabrahma_roopam Ganesham_bhajeaham.*

*Aum Sarva_Vighnaharam Devam Sarva_Vighna_Vivargitam
Sarva_Sidhi_Pradataram Vandeham Gumm Gananayakam”*

One who can recite the above hymn shall invoke the presence of Lord Ganesh without the shadow of the doubt says Lord Naradji.

This hymn is my favourite hymn together with the ashta_Ganesh shlokas that Naradji sings to Ganeshji in his prayers.

*Sree Ganeshaya namah Naraada uvachaal. Prannamya shirasaa
devamm gauree putramm vinaayakamm -- bhaktaa vaasam smaren.h
nityamm aayuhh kaama artha siddhayeh. 1*

*Prathamamm vakratunndamm cha eka danttamm dvitiyakamm
trritiiyamm krrishnna pi-ngakshhamm gaja vaktramm
chatturrthakamm. 2*

*Lambodaramm panchamamm cha shhasshhtthamm vikattameva
cha saptamamm vighna raajendraamm cha dhuumra varnnamm tatha
ashhtamamm. 3*

*Navammam bhaalachandram cha dashamam tu vinaayakam
ekaadasham gannapatim dvaadasham tu gajaanam. 4*

*Dwaadasaitaati naamaani tri sanmdhyam yahh patthenn.h
narahh na cha vighna bhayam tasya sarva siddhikaram prabho.5*

*Vidyarthii labhate vidyam dhanaarthii labhate dhanaam
putraarthii labhate putraan.h mokshhaarthi labhate gatim. 6*

*Japed.eh Gannapatistotram -- shhaddbhir.h maasaihh
phalam labhet.h sammvatsarena siddhim cha labhate natra
sammshayahh.7*

*Ashhttabhyo braahmanebhyashcha likhitvaa yahh
samarpayet.h -- tasya vidyaa bhavet.h sarvaa ganneshasya
prasaadatah. 8*

*Itti shree narad purani, sankashta nashanam – naaman shree
ganapatti stotram sampurnnam*

*Ekadantaya vakratundaya gauree tannayaye dhi mahi
gajeshanaye bhalchandraye shree Ganeshaya prachodayatt.*

It is proven that one who recited the above two hymns everyday once at the sunrise or upon waking up shall never ever encounter obstacles in his or her routine and one shall leave the household with the right foot first for the boys and left for the girls. His maha mantra which Naradji recited is as follows:

“Aum Antarikshayah Sarva_Sidhayah Mantra_siddhayah Ridhi_dayakayah,
Maha_Ganeshayah Tubhyam Jyeshtha_Jyeshthayah Namoh Namaha”

Anyone who recites this mantra for 108 times for 365 days beginning Ganesh Chaturthi shall accomplish any one wish one makes without the shadow of doubt. This is the Vedic promise of Vyas_guru.

It is believed that moon on the Chaturthi is NOT to be seen and if by some reason the Chaturthi moon is seen by the visible eyes then the following mantra is recited to overcome suffering of planets like Ketu or for the removal of all obstacles. The Ganesh mantra for the Chaturthi moon as recited by Lord Krishna's Radhika is as follows: This mantra may be recited

prelude to any puja or any mantra_manjaree to remove evil aspects of planets and Rahu-Ketu influx:

“Aum Gamm Glaum Gannapattaye Vighna_Vinashiney Swaha”.

The Grandeur of Ganesh manifests in the following delightful shaktis (energies) in all goodness in all households alike without any dualism:

1. Para_Brahma Vishwaroopam trinetrām Tripura_Sundaram MahaAntarikshayah, Maha_mantrasiddhayah and Maha_Yantrasidhayah swaroop the great AUM.
2. Shubh and Labh in the form of swastika representing the auspiciousness and profits or benefits.
3. Gaja_kesari Laxshmee Ganesh: the Padma_asnah Ganesh beloved of mata Laxshmee representing the whole cosmic karmic God.
4. Ridhi and Sidhi representing abundance and proliferations and success.
5. Shakti Ganesh as a guardian angel at the entrances of our homes in the form of MUSIKA_VAHANAH or the charioteer of mouse.

32 Forms of Ganesh in Agamic Scriptures

Baala Ganapati - Red colored image of a four armed Ganesha.

Dharuna Vinayakar: Red colored image of an eight armed Ganesha – (rare).

This the maha_kali Maha_dharun warrior Ganesh.

Bhakti Vinayakar: Grey colored image of four armed Ganesha .

Veera Vinayakar: Red colored image of 16 armed Ganapati.

Shakti Ganapati: Red colored image of 4 armed Ganapati, seated with his consort to his left.

Dwija Vinayakar: White colored image of four faced Ganesha with 4 arms.

Siddhi Vinayakar: Golden colored image of four armed Ganapati.

Ucchishta Ganapati: Blue colored image of six armed Ganapati with his consort.

Vigna Vinayakar: Gold colored image of eight armed Ganapati.

Kshipra Ganapati: Red colored image of four armed Ganesha bearing a ratna kumbham.

Heramba Vinayakar: Black colored image of ten armed Ganesha with five faces, seated on a lion.

Lakshmi Vinayakar: White colored image of eight armed Ganesha with two consorts.

Makara Vinayakar: Red colored image of Ganesha with a third eye, 10 arms, bearing a ratna kumbham, with his consort.

Vijaya Vinayakar: Red colored image of 4 armed Ganesha on the mooshika mount.

Nritta Vinayakar: Gold colored image of Ganesha in a dance posture.

Urdhva Vinayakar: Gold colored image of six armed Ganesha with his consort.

Ekakshara Vinayakar: Red colored image of Ganesha with a third eye, seated on a lotus.

Vara Vinayakar: Red colored image of 4 armed Vinayaka with a third eye.

Dhryakshara Vinayaka: Gold colored image of four armed Vinayakar, decorated with Chaamara ear rings.

Kshipraprasaada Vinayakar: Red colored image of six armed Ganapati.

Haridra Vinayakar: Yellow colored image of four armed Ganapati.

Ekadhanta Vinayakar: Blue colored image of four armed Ganapati.

Srishti Vinayakar: Red colored image of four armed Ganapati seated on his mooshika mount.

Utthanda Vinayakar: Red colored image of 10 armed Ganesha with his consort to his left.

Ranamochana Vinayaka: Crystal image of four armed Vinayakar.

Dundi Vinayakar: Four armed image of Ganesha bearing a tusk, a garland, an axe and a gem studded vessel.

Dwimukha Vinayakar: Red colored image of Ganesha with two faces and four arms.

Trimukha Vinayakar: Red colored image of Ganesha with three faces and six arms seated on a golden lotus.

Simha Vinayakar: White colored image of Ganesha with eight arms (with an arm bearing a lions face).

Yoga Vinayakar: Red colored image of Ganesha in the posture of a yogi.

Durga Vinayakar: Red colored image of Ganesha with eight arms.

Sankatahara Vinayakar: Red colored image of four armed Ganesha clothed in blue, seated on a lotus peetham with his consort to his left.

There is always a small shrine of Vigneswara, attached to all Shiva temples. In the Vishnu temples too he is worshipped as *Tumbikkaialvar* - the sage of the elephant's trunk - and as *Vishvaksena*. Sometimes he has his own temples too. As he is the favourite son of Shiva, he receives honours equal to Shiva. His image is with sincere devotion adored by men and women alike. He is supposed to represent the several personifications of sagacity, shrewdness, patience, and learning. As a test of his wisdom, it is related that when he was a child and playing in company with his brother Subrahmanya-Kartikaya, Shiva promised to present a mango and marriage to him who made a circuit round the world and returned first. Subrahmanya summoned his peacock, mounted it and was ready for the journey. But Ganesh calmly went round Shiva-parvatti put together, his father and mother, and demanded the fruit and crowned for marriage.

"But you never went round the world," said Shiva.

"What is the world, but your own holy self and the holy feet of my beloved mother? I went round you both together. *Ergo*, I went round the world and its entire grand cosmic illusion maya." was Ganesha's wise reply.

Shiva was of course convinced, praised Ganesh for his cleverness, shrewdness, and gave him the promised fruit, which however he shared with Subrahmanya and crowned him for ridhi-sidhi marriage.

The peculiarity of this deity is that his worship is combined as it were with that of every other God. All sects unite in claiming him as their own. It is for this reason that his shrines are found generally associated with those of

other deities - Shiva and Vishnu. The largest temple built solely in honour of Ganesh in India is the Uchchippillaiyar temple on the top of the famous and beautiful rock at Tiruchirapalli.

Though this god is invoked on several occasions during the years, there is a special day in every year which is set apart particularly for his worship, and this day is called the *Vinayaka Chaturthi* day, which falls on the fourth lunar day of the bright half of the month of Simha. The Tamils term this day *Pillaiyar Chavutti* day. Of all the figures in Hindu Mythology, that of Ganesh or Pilaiyar must be most familiar to every European. In the bathing ghat of every river and underneath the pipal tree will be seen a figure in a sitting posture, short and stout, with a protuberant stomach and four hands, riding a mouse and with the body of man and the head of an elephant. This is the image of Ganesh or Pillaiyar, and there is not a single village in the whole of India which does not possess at least half a dozen of these familiar images. The elephant head has only one full tusk and the other appears cut off in the middle, the result of a scuffle between Ganesh and Parasurama. The "belly god" is on this account called *Ekadanta*, or the single - tusked. Ganesh is said to have written the *Mahabharata* at the dictation of Vyasa - for it is said that the later (Shree Ganeshji) was so quick in repeating the epic that no mortal could have managed to follow him.

The first person to observe the 'vratt' (vow) of Ganesh Chaturthi was Chandra - the moon. After Ganeshji's fame as leader ('pati') of Shiva's 'ganas', hence Ganapati, he was travelling through the heavens. As he passed Chandra - who prided on his attractive features, he slighted Ganeshji's peculiar form. In return, Ganeshji cursed him, "You shall bear the fruit of your karma. Whenever anybody does your darshan one will be cursed too." Chandra begged for forgiveness. Ganeshji then advised him to observe the Ganesh Chaturthi vratt and was freed from the curse. By being aware of the detrimental effects of false pride one should cultivate humility. The Skanda Purana mentions this sentiment of the festival. The Vayu Puran advocates the observance of this festival by listening to the following relevant episode of Shri Krishna, to be relieved from false accusation: When Shri Krishna was falsely accused of pilfering the Syamantak Mani (gem) he observed Ganesh Chaturthi

and was freed from the false charge. This festival also inspires devotees to inculcate two virtues; obeying the commands of God and God's choicest devotee, and consolidating faith in them, just as Ganeshji had faith and trust in Parvati Mataji regarding circling of his parents.

Names of Ganeshji

Ekadanta (one-toothed): To scribe the Mahabharat Katha Ganeshji removed one of his tusks to carve a quill from it. He then scribed the epic on palm leaves as the sage Ved Vyas recited it. The scribing took three years! In south India there is a belief that when ploughing first began on earth, it was Lord Ganeshji who first ploughed using one of his tusks. In the Uttar Ramayan, Brahmand Puran and Padma Puran there is a reference of a battle between Ganeshji and Parshuram. During the duel, the latter's axe fractured one of Ganeshji's tusks According to the Brahmand Puran, it was his left tusk.

There are other names related to his body and virtues. A few commonly known are listed below:

- Sumukhaya
- Lambodaraya - from the long vast- 'lambo', tummy (big belly) - 'udar'.
- Gajakarnakaya - from the large elephant 'Gaja' ears - 'karna.'
- Kapilaya - from his ruddy complexion.
- Vikata - heavy-bodied.
- Bbhaalachandra - having a Chandra (moon) on his forehead - 'bhal.'
- Dwaimatur - one who has 'dwi' - two, 'mata' - mother; Parvati - who gave birth to him and Malini - a demoness who nurtured him.
- Vakratunda - one who breaks the ego of he who behaves anti-socially ('Vakra').
- Maha-kaya – one whose body is grand as the cosmos
- Vakra-tunda – Beloved of all suns put together.
- Vikataya – one who grants divine eternal happiness
- Vinayakaya – one who is the supreme cosmic prime minister

- Mudgal - In south India, a special 'Mudgal Puran' extols Ganapati's glory. It cites 32 names, while 'Shardatilak' lists 51 names.
- Vigneshwar - One who removes mayic obstacles - 'vignas'
- Dhumaraketava – fiery in stature – filled with the energy of mars.
- Ganadhyakshaya – one who is the leader of ganas
- Gajananaya – beautiful elephant faced
- Surpakarnaya – large basket like ears
- Herambaya – supremely powerful one
- Skanda-purvajaya – one whose elder brother is Subrahmanyam
- Maha-Ganapataye – grandeur of cosmic gods
- Haripriyaye – beloved of all Gods and God Vishnoo presides in him.

Symbolism of Ganesh

Since Ganeshji represents auspiciousness, his whole being has symbol purports meaningful zest for devotees.

Large ears - signify listening to God's katha with great zeal.

Small eyes - to do the Lord's darshan minutely.

Large forehead - to develop great intellect to realise God.

Large stomach - depicts his great capacity to empathise with the woes of devotees.

Short stout and hefty legs - depicts patience.

Long trunk - symbolic of his deep scriptural wisdom.

Mouse as vehicle - a hyperactive creature, symbolic of our indriyas. Therefore Ganesh sitting on such a vehicle represents a deity of control over the indriyas.

Four arms - which hold: 'ankush' - symbol for control over the mind 'ladu' - for happiness 'pash' - axe to punish the indriyas and antahkaran 'ashirvad mudra' – blessings for the well being of humanity. Depending on the role of Ganapati, the number of arms varies, as do the type of objects.

Ashta_dgipal devta: - one who controls all eight directions of the cosmos with his swastika-vachannam and atharvashishtha shlokas.

The Shiva Puran cites another story. Prajapati had two daughters, Siddhi (wealth) and Buddhi (intellect). He approached Parvati and Shivaji for the girls' marriage to Kartikeya and Ganeshji. However both girls wished to marry only the latter realising that Kartikaya wanted to observe celibacy. Thus they married Ganesh. Siddhi gave birth to a son named 'Shubh' (auspiciousness) and Buddhi to 'Labh' (merit). Therefore when businessmen and merchants offer puja to Ganeshji and Laxshmeeji they write 'Shubh' and 'Labh' inside their account ledgers to invoke the two deities.

Historical reflections:

According to the historian Shri Rajwade, records reveal that Ganesh Chaturthi was celebrated even during the reigns of Satavahana, Rashtrakuta and Chalukya. There are also references in historical records to similar celebrations during Peshwa times, Lord Ganapati being the family deity of the Peshwas. After the end of Peshwa rule, from 1818 to 1892 Ganesh Festival remained a family affair in Maharashtra. It was around 1893, during the growth of nascent Indian nationalism, that the radical nationalist Bal Gangadhar Tilak began to organise the Ganesh Utsav as a social and religious function. Since then, Ganesh Chaturthi has been celebrated throughout Maharashtra with great community enthusiasm and participation. From then onwards, this festive occasion has grown in acceptance and today, commands the respect of millions of citizens all over Maharashtra. Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak brought Ganesha as a deity out on the streets. It was a unique move by this freedom fighter, which he achieved with the Ganpati visarjana or immersion procession, wherein the mass output of several Ganesh mandals is taken out on a parade on the final day of the Ganesh festival and taken to be immersed. This process was started in 1892 and is now prevalent virtually all over Maharashtra, with special emphasis on Bombay and Pune. Lokmanya Tilak attached this mass celebration to increase national awareness about the Freedom movement. Clay Ganeshas are worshipped and brought to immersion sites, where huge crowds gather to bid him an emotional and frenzied farewell.

In Pune, as the sun sets over darkening rivers, the images are taken out in boats and as each one is immersed, a cry is raised asking him to return the next year. It is an emotional and public farewell to their beloved god as parthiva (of the earth), who like the Phoenix, will rise once again the following year.

Traditions and customs, rites and rituals of Ganesh Chaturthi:

Ganesh Chaturthi is a festival which commences on the fourth day of the bright half of the month of Bhadrapada, around August or September. It is variously celebrated for one, two, five, seven or 11 days. The day commemorates certain events connected with Ganesha. It is the day on which he materialised as Mayureshwara, to kill the demon Sindhu, who had acquired extraordinary powers through the worship of Surya. Mayureshwara is also one of the ashtavinayakas (the eight forms of Ganesha). This is also the birth that Shiva has chosen to celebrate in Kailasa.

A special puja is performed for Ganesha. The worship of the deity involves getting a corner ready to receive the god. Ganesha is invited with a special phrase and with material and verbal offerings, the puja begins. It involves the panchamrut (five nectars), which includes milk, curd, ghee, honey and jaggery, with which the god's icon is bathed, cleansing in between with water. Ganesha is then given a red garment and the sacred thread - saying it is silver. He is then smeared with red sandal paste and offered red or yellow flowers. A lamp is lit, bells chime and food is offered in six symbolic mouthfuls - not to the god's body, but to his five panchapranas or 'vital breaths' and the one beyond - the absolute.

During the festival, puja is performed twice every day - once in the morning and again in the evening. Ganesha is offered special leaves and flowers, 21 of each and white durva grass. The idol is formally installed on the first day and given life in the presence of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva, and the Vedas. Touching the idol with blades of durva grass, he is brought to life step by step and made to go through 15 of the 16 rites of passage that each Hindu goes through in his lifetime. (The sixteenth one, which is for death, is omitted). Ganesh viasarjan is very much a Maharashtra culture.

The Ganesha mantra is chanted, followed by a Ganesha prayer. The last puja done, the family or congregation gathers around and rice grains are placed on the head of the idol, which is moved, symbolically unseating him.

As a matter of interest there are about 91 different figures of Ganesha according to research done by several scholars. The details of their make up may vary from figure to figure, but with no change in the main set-up. It is the enigma of certain striking variations in details that the sublime in the figures of Ganesha has to be sought for.

Some figures are seen sitting with their trunks turned towards the left side, invariably reaching a bowl of modaks (a sweet edible and festive preparation), while in some figures, the trunks are seen turning towards the right and in yet others, the trunk is straight, hanging down, with or without a pot of nectar in the curve of their trunks.

In some images, Ganesha is seen standing, resting his right foot on a lion and his left foot on a mouse (his chosen mode of transport), while in some other images, his left foot is found resting on a mouse and his right foot lifted in an effort to touch the serpent girdle - his mount carrying a jewel in its mouth.

Problems and limitations:

Despite the good intentions and divine idea behind this festival, in modern times there have been a few stray incidents of religious tensions. Environmentalists have questioned the dumping of the idols made increasingly with chemicals which pollute the lakes and seas. On September 2004, the Chennai High Court imposed a temporary ban on such immersions. Every year there are at least a couple of casualties associated with accidents (while dumping the idols) or clashes associated with this. There is conflicting perception because according to the Vedas, the Vinayaka Chaturthi represents the first manifestation of the Ganesh and the ten days subsequent to that day representing the ananta-chaturdashi or the fourteenth day of the bright cycle of the moon of the badrapada month commemorates the end of Ganesh utsav and Ganesh is believed to rise back to life on this particular day as the spirit of Ganesh. To immerse idols of Ganesh in waters to me does not hold any truth!

As a Vedic scholar and as a Vedic practitioner, I believe that in accordance with the Vedas there is only one truth and truth is not dual. Over the historical passage of time, people have divided and manipulated that truth. So more and more interpretations emanate from different regions of India. However, in my view, Ganesh chaturthi is the fourth day of the bright cycle of the moon and when such an occasion falls on a TUESDAY as it does on September 26th 2006, such a day is considered as most auspiciously prolific and it may be even noted that the moon falls into the libra rashi which again signifies balance and justice. So, if one truly wishes to contemplate goodwill and success from the higher order, it is hereby suggestive of the Vedas that one observes the Ganesh chaturthi vratt on which day one must NOT look at the moon and follow up with the Ganesh chaturthi vratt falling on the Tuesday September 26th 2006.

Reciting the mantra-manjari of Shree Naradji given herein and recital of the ashtha-vighneshwara shloka of the Naradji brings immense peace, happiness and internal divine bliss.

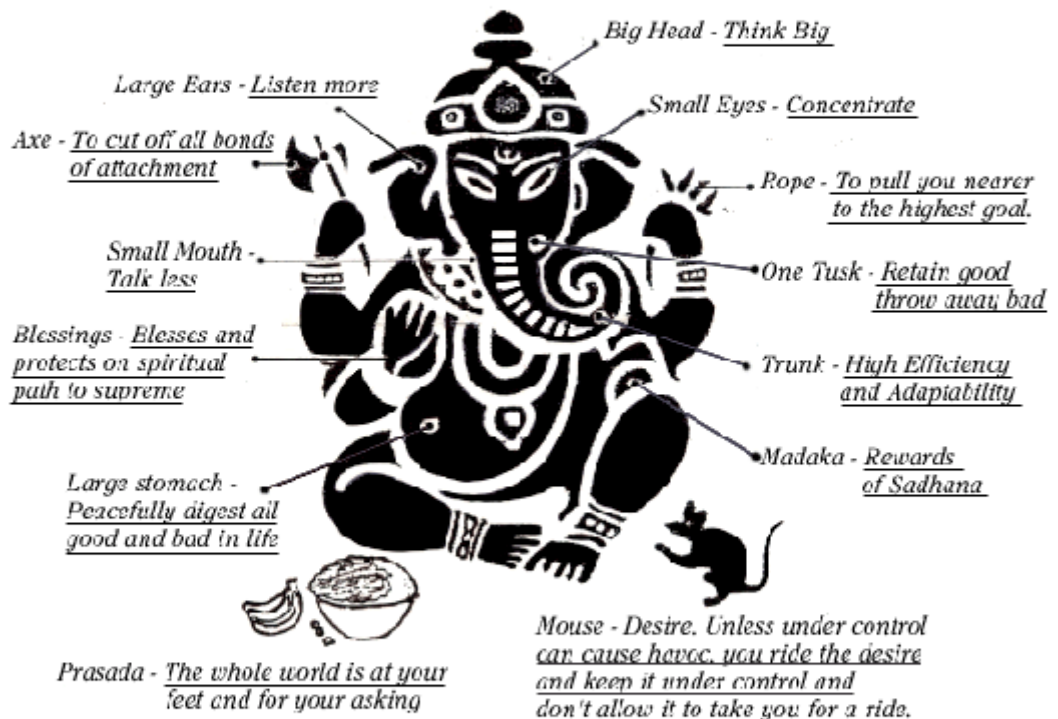


Ganesh: The twelve forms of Ganesh and mantras

Symbolism: Ganesh



Ganesh Symbolism



Dedicated to the great divine spirit of life of life Maha_Ganesha

Jyotikar Pattni ©

August 25th 2006-08-25